

AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE CRUMP ERA
AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. RILEY GARNER

BY CHARLES W. STANFORD
TRANSCRIBED BY CAROL LANEY
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE
MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY

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"AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE CRUMP ERA"

AN INTERVIEW

WITH

MR. RILEY GARNER

APRIL 27, 1977

BY CHARLES W. CRAWFORD

TRANSCRIBED BY MS. CAROL LANEY

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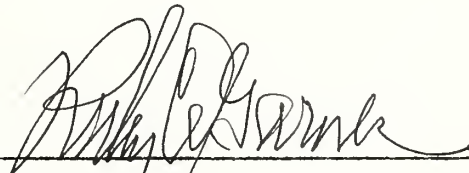
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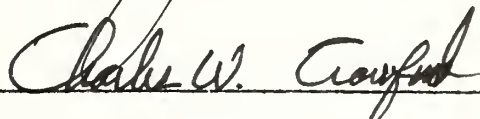
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PLACE Memphis, TN
DATE Feb. 15, 1988



(INTERVIEWEE)



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of Memphis State University)

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

REPORT OF THE
COMMISSIONER OF THE
BUREAU OF CHEMISTRY
ON THE
ANALYSIS OF THE
SILICONES
PREPARED BY
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
IN THE
LABORATORY OF
DR. J. H. DUDLEY
AND
DR. J. H. HARRIS
IN THE
MONTH OF
JANUARY, 1921

Presented to the
FACULTY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
AT THE
MEETING OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY
Held on the 15th day of
February, 1921

By
J. H. DUDLEY
AND
J. H. HARRIS

CHICAGO, ILL.
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THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY.
THIS PROJECT IS "AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE CRUMP ERA". THE PLACE IS MEMPHIS,
TENNESSEE. THE DATE IS APRIL 27, 1977, AND THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MR.
RILEY GARNER. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR
OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE AND IS
TRANSCRIBED BY MS. CAROL LANEY.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Garner, let's start with some biographical
information about you and then we'll get on to
your account of what it was like when you got involved in county govern-
ment.

MR. GARNER: All right. I graduated from Lexington High
School, Lexington, Tennessee--that's where I
grew up--in 1939. I came to Memphis in the fall of 1939, and entered
Memphis State University. At that time it was State Teacher's College
before it was changed to Memphis State University. Of course I worked
my way through school. I worked the entire time I was out there at various
jobs including the Post Office, Railway Express, the drive-in movies out
on Lamar, of which I was assistant manager for a while. And I worked
some at the college in the Industrial Arts Department because I had had
Industrial Arts in high school and took some national defense courses at
the same time I was going there at night. Then I worked in aircraft

riveting and aircraft sheet-metal at which time I did some student teaching up at 612 Adams in the National Defense School. Then my last year out at Memphis State, I worked at Fisher Memphis Aircraft Division from four in the afternoon until twelve midnight. Of course the war came on and I volunteered, went in to the Naval Air Corps where I had specialist rating, Aviation Volunteer Specialist as an instructor. And we were setting up these schools.

First we went to Chicago and after we took our shots and so forth we went over to Eighty-Seventh and Anthony, Chicago Vocational School, and worked on lesson plans. We had to take a two year course that they had been teaching and cut it down to sixteen weeks so we had to do a lot of visual aid teaching and a lot of visual methods because we had to train mechanics for the fleet. We were in the war and we didn't have enough mechanics to keep the planes in the air. So, from there I came to Millington and helped to set up that school and taught for a while and then went to Columbus, Ohio, to SC-1 School, and from there we went to the fleet. In fact, we felt like that it was better that we could train the people out in the fleet just as efficiently as we could to bring them back to the B-schools here.

So, that is what I was doing when the war ended. I spent some time on Guam, Kwajalein, Eniwetok, and aboard the carrier Subec Bay that sank during the Korean War. I didn't go to the Korean War. This was during World War II. I got back to the States and was discharged December 7, 1945.

From there I went with the War Assets Administration, which was disposing of war surplus property. I was Chief of the Veterans Division for West Tennessee. The veterans would have to get certified through my office. My office was on the thirteenth floor of the Shrine Building--before they could go out and purchase at these sales of surplus property, vehicles, hardware, textiles or whatever type business they might be in.

Of course I had met Mr. Crump. I met Mr. Crump while I was out at Memphis State. Another connection I had with Mr. Crump was with a lady out there who was with Head of the Cafeteria by the name of Mrs. Marshall. We all called her Mama Marshall. She used to nurse Mr. Crump's mother in Holly Springs, Mississippi. She was a nurse before she became a dietitian out at Memphis State. So, I guess he was just looking for some people to fill certain jobs and I was one that was selected. When he called me down there he was talking about it and he said a lot of bookkeeping was involved. And I said, "Well, you better pass me up because I did not have accounting out at Memphis State, so I wouldn't be qualified." And after he kept on talking for a while--by the way, Bert Bates happened to be with me up there. Bert and I had been friends for a long time, and he said, "Well, you will have a bookkeeper." So, come to find out it was County Trustee and Banker for the entire County Government plus collecting all the taxes and enforcing all the tax laws. And so I have been here thirty years.

DR. CRAWFORD:

Now, let's see, about the experience at Memphis State. How did you meet Mr. Crump while you

were there?

MR. GARNER:

Well, the committee was gotten up to change the name of State Teacher's College to Memphis

State and I was on that committee. We'd call on Mr. Crump and Mr. Crump was the type person that once he met you he never did forget you.

DR. CRAWFORD: I have heard people say that he really remembered names. Do you know how he did that so well? Did he have any association? Keep any files or anything?

MR. GARNER: Well, no I've heard him say that if you just take the man's name, run it around in your mind four or five times while you are shaking hands with him--and I have attempted to do that myself--it does help you to remember tremendously. And associate the face, associate the body, associate it with some common object that helps. But he was one of the best as far as remembering names, I think that I have ever known.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I think that you can learn a lot from successful people and as I understand it, Mr. Crump was really successful at remembering people once he met them.

MR. GARNER: He was very much so.

DR. CRAWFORD: So, you worked with him on the committee to change Memphis Teacher's College.

MR. GARNER: We called on them--the Legislature was in session--and he got the job done. In fact, it was changed from State Teacher's College to Memphis State at that time. Not Memphis State University, just Memphis State College.

DR. CRAWFORD: What year was that, do you remember?

MR. GARNER: Nineteen hundred forty, I believe. Either '40

or '41; I believe it was 1940. The Legislature didn't meet every year then; it was every other year, so I believe it was 1940.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did Mr. Crump remain in touch with Mrs. Marshall the dietitian, Mama Marshall?

MR. GARNER: Oh, he and Mrs. Marshall were great friends and Mrs. Marshall and I had gotten to be great friends.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you suppose she recommended you to Mr. Crump?

MR. GARNER: Well, I understand she had something to do with it, yes, Quite a few people did. And then after I got back from overseas, I was interested in politics. I did help them out in the war. Joe Hicks was a City Assessor. I would help them get people registered and I think Joe Hicks had a bearing on it. Bert Bates had a bearing on it through the American Legion.

DR. CRAWFORD: H-I-C-K-S?

MR. GARNER: H-I-C-K-S. He is deceased now.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, let's see, when you returned from the war, you became active in the American Legion?

MR. GARNER: Very active in the American Legion, yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: You did say that Mr. Crump counted on the Legion a good deal for finding leadership for positions?

MR. GARNER: Yes, he did. He really did.

THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF KING CHARLES THE FIRST

IN THE YEAR 1649

BY JOHN BURNET

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

IN TWO VOLUMES

THE FIRST

OF THE

REIGN OF KING CHARLES THE FIRST

IN THE YEAR 1649

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IN THE YEAR 1649

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IN TWO VOLUMES

THE FIRST

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DR. CRAWFORD: And Mr. Bert Bates was President of the American Legion then?

MR. GARNER: No, Bert was past Commander of the American Legion, also had been the former United States Marshall under Senator K.D. McKellar, and held a position as Collector of License and Privileges. Mr. Crump and Bert were very close. But they would fall out sometimes and then they'd get back close again. But I would say they were very close most of the time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who went with you for this interview with Mr. Crump?

MR. GARNER: Bert Bates.

DR. CRAWFORD: And did he tell you at the time what the position was that he needed filled?

MR. GARNER: No, I don't think Bert even knew.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Crump remembered you from student days, I'm sure, and knew of you from your war record then.

MR. GARNER: Yeah. I'm sure he did.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember that meeting, any more details of what it was like?

MR. GARNER: Well, several people I think were up for that job, but it was to replace a City Commissioner, Louis Grashot, who had been elected County Trustee. And a job had come open as City Commissioner and he had been boosted up to City Commissioner which caused this vacancy. So I went in office April 21, 1947 and then

I had to run for office in '48.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, let's see, at first were you appointed to this by the county court?

MR. GARNER: By the county court, right.

DR. CRAWFORD: But the next time in 1948, you had to run for election?

MR. GARNER: I had to run for re-election.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember anything about your campaign in 1948?

MR. GARNER: Well, of course, poll tax. We had to have a poll tax to vote and all the poll tax came under my jurisdiction. I made the front page of the paper lots of times because I had certain people out selling poll tax that were bonded. The poll tax was two dollars each and you couldn't just have anybody and everybody out selling poll tax unless they were bonded because I was responsible for that money. Maybe we would sell a hundred thousand poll taxes and that would be two hundred thousand dollars.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where were they sold, what kind of places?

MR. GARNER: Well, we had firemen selling them, that I had appointed out in the neighborhoods. We had fire stations where they would be bought and also bought at the office and I believe that is about the extent of it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did the people who sold them receive any commission or was it just a service?

MR. GARNER: No, just a service.

DR. CRAWFORD: That's right, everyone in Tennessee had to have a poll tax.

MR. GARNER: Had to have a poll tax. That was abolished I believe in 1952 by the Constitutional Convention.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, I believe there was a campaign in Nashville-- or at least some of the supporters were from Nashville--against the poll tax.

MR. GARNER: Yeah, I think so. I was glad when it was abolished because it was really a headache, I'm telling you.

DR. CRAWFORD: It took a lot of bookkeeping, didn't it?

MR. GARNER: It really did and you had to keep up with-- they were by numbers--who had them.

DR. CRAWFORD: And that information had to be available by Election Day, didn't it?

MR. GARNER: That's correct.

DR. CRAWFORD: In your campaign, in 1948, did you do any particular work in campaigning--or did you need to?

MR. GARNER: I didn't have any opposition.

DR. CRAWFORD: It's an ideal campaign, isn't it?

MR. GARNER: Yeah. I didn't have any in 1952, didn't have any in '54. First opposition I had was after

Mr. Crump's death. That was in 1956.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, obviously that did not change it, for you have been in this office for thirty years, haven't you?

MR. GARNER: Yeah, thirty years. I've had opposition only twice.

DR. CRAWFORD: Has that been a record for this office?

MR. GARNER: That's a record for this office, and it's a record for the state of Tennessee, and I think it is a record for the nation because I'm on the National Board of Directors of County Officials and they don't know of anybody in the nation who had served in one office, especially an office that handles big finance like we do, for that long.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Garner, that is quite a record. And there is no limitation as to age, in holding this office.

MR. GARNER: No, that is correct.

DR. CRAWFORD: What year were you born, now?

MR. GARNER: Nineteen hundred twenty. So, I'm 57 years old.

DR. CRAWFORD: You might set quite a few more records before you are through with this office.

MR. GARNER: Well, I could have retired five years ago, Dr. Crawford, I could have retired ahead of time, but I enjoy serving the people, I really do. Just like last year, we handled through this office \$478,000,000 dollars. Four hundred and

seventy-eight million of funds came through this office last year.

DR. CRAWFORD: That's a large business operation.

MR. GARNER: It really is. And it is going to be over a half a billion this year, I have just been told by the Auditing Department. I was told the other day, it is going to be over half a billion. And to give you a comparison, the first year I was here we handled eight million dollars.

DR. CRAWFORD: And last year was four hundred and--

MR. GARNER: Seventy-eight million. In fact, I had the figures--how much funds I had been responsible for since I have been here and it is in the excess of three billion and eight hundred million dollars. And I knock on wood, we've never been a dime short.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you have plenty of auditing, I'm sure, and things like that.

MR. GARNER: Oh yeah, we balance out every day, every day it stands on its own.

DR. CRAWFORD: You are computerized, I suppose.

MR. GARNER: Yeah, we are now. Of course, it was sort of an antiquated system when I first came up here, but we have changed it from year to year, a little bit of a change from year to year. In fact, we set this system up ourselves. We didn't have somebody to come in and set it up for us.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, when you took over, handling only eight million dollars, I suppose a simple system

would handle it, but with this volume today it wouldn't work.

MR. GARNER: It wouldn't work today. You would have to have too many employees.

DR. CRAWFORD: How many employees do you have now?

MR. GARNER: Forty.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember how many you had when you took over the job?

MR. GARNER: I had twenty-seven, but I've added to it. I'm the only trustee in the State of Tennessee that bothers about collecting delinquent taxes. So actually we only have twenty-one employees in the trustees office. We've got less employees. The others are in delinquent tax collection and also the Legal Department, which is included in the forty employees.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you mean to tell me that you have increased your collection something like, I guess like, fifty times and have actually decreased your employees in the last thirty years?

MR. GARNER: That's correct. That's [the] trustee's office alone, now. When I came in office they had over three million dollars back in 1945. But during the depression years people just couldn't pay their taxes. We got Mr. Crump and Mr. Hale and I told them that I would try to collect that money. So we set up a Delinquent Tax Department. I appointed a Delinquent Tax Collector and we collected all of that money. But they gave me the authority to waive interest and penalty from 1913. It went back to 1913 and to 1921. We would waive 90%

of the interest and penalty because interest and penalty was a lot more than the tax and the county didn't want the property. We wanted to give the people a chance to pay it and let them keep the property. And from 1921 to 1931, we waived 75% of the interest and penalty. And then from '31 to '45, we waived 50% of the interest and penalty. So that is how we collected all of the taxes. And some of them couldn't pay it all at one time. We'd set it up on partial payment. Maybe they would pay ten dollars a month, just how much they could pay. And we'd have a partial payment account running from thirty to forty thousand dollars a month, which was a lot of bookkeeping involved there too. But we collected all the money.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was Mr. Crump's role in government in Shelby County and Memphis? How would you describe that? I know it's a long story.

MR. GARNER: Mr. Crump was Mayor and I think he was Squire or held some type job before he got to be Mayor. Then he was ousted as Mayor.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir, in 1916.

MR. GARNER: And after he was ousted, he ran for County Trustee. The Mayor's job was paying four thousand dollars a year at that time. He ran for the County Trustee, which is the office I hold now, which was on a fee basis then. He got two percent of all the money that came through the office.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, let's see, this would have been before World War I, wouldn't it?

MR. GARNER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember the years he held it, approximately?

MR. GARNER: Well, from 1916 to about 1928.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir. And his income in that time was about how much now?

MR. GARNER: He got two percent of everything that was handled through the office and he paid his help out of it and the rest of the money was his. But as soon as he got out, they got a bill to the legislature to put it on salary. In other words, don't put it [on] a fee basis. I've kidded him about that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Have you figured how much you would be making now if you were getting two percent of your collection?

MR. GARNER: Well, it would be two percent of five hundred million dollars, so it would be how much? Two percent of five hundred million. It would be about ten million, wouldn't it?

DR. CRAWFORD: I believe it would.

MR. GARNER: About ten million dollars a year.

DR. CRAWFORD: That would be a fantastic income!

Out of which he paid his staff of perhaps five people or so. You certainly don't have a situation like that now.

MR. GARNER: Well, all of the offices were fee offices then, too not only. . but this was the most lucrative office--County Trustee's office. So that gave him a pretty good base to build a political organization. Of course, he did an awful

lot for the people and even since I have come up here. He had a chauffeur by the name of Mr. Coleman, C-O-L-E-M-A-N.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know if he is still living?

MR. GARNER: No, I do not. But he was his chauffeur for a long time. And he would call Coleman in--and he did it in my presence--and give him money to go buy groceries etc. and go to this address and deliver these groceries. And shall I say you sent them, Mr. Crump? And he said, "No, don't tell them who sent them, just call them to the door and give them the groceries."

DR. CRAWFORD: And that was just an act of charity on his part, wasn't it?

MR. GARNER: Yeah, actual charity on his part.

DR. CRAWFORD: Would that be people who were in special need?

MR. GARNER: People who were in special need that he would hear about, that's correct. Of course, we had this football game for the blind, you know. I guess you may have heard about that, where that we picked the best two teams in high school prep football and usually it was on Thanksgiving day or Thanksgiving night and it would be a complete sellout at Crump Stadium. They would even have to add additional seats. We'd ask for contributions and how many tickets that you needed. And of all the blind people at Christmas time, we had a substantial check to give each one of them, five or six hundred dollars each.

DR. CRAWFORD: As a result of that game?

MR. GARNER: As a result of that game. It was a complete charity game, nobody got any money whatsoever.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you didn't have many expenses in putting it on?

MR. GARNER: Didn't have any expenses to put it on. We all got out and sold the tickets ourselves.

DR. CRAWFORD: What happened to that game?

MR. GARNER: Well, after Mr. Crump died the Lions' Club took it over and they did fairly well with it for a while and then they just finally faded it out.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you have any idea the extent of his charities that people did not know anything about, like those he helped by sending groceries to anonymously?

MR. GARNER: Well, he'd have a day at the fair for all the shut-ins and things of that sort. He'd rent the fairgrounds and he did that at least once a year or maybe more often or take all the shut-ins on a picnic.

DR. CRAWFORD: Let's see, did he pay for the day at the fair with his own money or was that contributed by the fair?

MR. GARNER: No, he paid it himself. In other words, that was not contributed, it was paid for.

DR. CRAWFORD: And that was a special day at the fair for people who could not get out themselves.

MR. GARNER: Well, he did that sometimes but what he would do was just rent the entire fair grounds for the kids and so forth, all the orphanage homes and all the

shut-ins and so forth and so on. It would just be a big day with plenty of food and all the rides for free and everything. He just rented the entire thing, paid for the entire amount himself.

DR. CRAWFORD: And people who came could ride the rides and get free food and so forth?

MR. GARNER: Right, that is correct. Plus he would have a opossum hunt down at Holly Springs, Mississippi, and all of the roads would be so clogged that it would take you hours to get down there and back, there were so many people.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did he do that annually?

MR. GARNER: He did that annually, yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: I suppose that was in the fall, wasn't it?

MR. GARNER: In the fall. And at one time, Paul Barrett had a opossum hunt (Paul Barrett, who I'm sure you have heard of, was a banker that died just a few months ago and was Circuit Court Clerk at one time before he got into the banking business.) I remember one time we went out there on a opossum hunt and the first opossum that was treed by the dogs had a collar around it, E.H.Crump. They had turned that opossum loose before we got there, see.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir, Mr. Barrett, who died this year, I believe his daughter gave him a copy of my latest book, I think he was able to see it before his death.

MR. GARNER: Oh, is that right? Well good, that's fine.

DR. CRAWFORD: And did you go on that opossum hunt at his place, at Mr. Barrett's place?

MR. GARNER: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I was down at Holly Springs, Mississippi. We had nickelodeons--places for people to dance and so forth--and they kept me busy putting nickels in those juke boxes most of the time. In fact, I had a job to do. Most of the elected officials did. We worked.

DR. CRAWFORD: I gather you had good relations between Memphis and Holly Springs.

MR. GARNER: Yes, we did. In fact, I had a brother-in-law, at that time who was sheriff of Marshall County at Holly Springs, L.B. Slayden. And they had a fire down there one time it probably would have burned Holly Springs down. I don't remember the year it was now, I think it was about '53 or '54. And of course, they had a very small Fire Department down there to save Holly Springs.

DR. CRAWFORD: I remember talking with some people in Holly Springs. I have several friends there. Some of them told about seeing that fire when the Memphis Fire Department came down. Who arranged and who paid for this annual opossum hunt and what was the purpose of that? Just for fun or was it fund-raising?

MR. GARNER: No, it was just fun. Mr. Crump paid for it.

DR. CRAWFORD: And Mr. Crump's friends and other people attended?

MR. GARNER: Right.

DR. CRAWFORD: What happened other than the celebration in town? Did people actually go opossum hunting

and bring in opossums?

MR. GARNER: Well, a few opossums were caught, they had
opossum dogs, so they did bring in opossums.

But it was just to have a good time and they had plenty of food down
there and places to dance--nickelodeons--and just a regular frolic you
might say.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever meet Mr. Crump's family down there?

MR. GARNER: I think Robert Crump would usually go down
there with him--one of his sons. But I don't
think his wife ever did go down there with him.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, ladies don't like opossum hunting as well
as men do.

MR. GARNER: Especially, his wife was kind of getting up in
years too, you know. Of course, my wife went
with me down there. And at one time I was asked if I wanted to be Fire
and Police Commissioner. And I told Mr. Crump, "Well, I'd rather stay
where I am because I know what I'm doing and I have had very little ex-
perience in that line." Then in 1954 a group of my friends including
Paul Barrett and all of them wanted me to be the Sheriff of Shelby County,
which I could have been. My picture came out in the paper as the next
Sheriff of Shelby County.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did that get in the paper? Do you know?

MR. GARNER: Well, I don't know. The Commercial Appeal had
it in the paper that I was to be the next Sheriff

of Shelby County--and of course I went up to see Mr. Crump and I told him, "I think Buddy Dwyer has got more experience. He's Assistant Chief of Police (and Buddy was a good friend of mine) he's one of our judges now and he would be a better man than me for that job because I'd rather stay where I am than to move up to the Sheriff's Department."

He told me that all my friends wanted me to run for sheriff. He even mentioned Paul Barrett and mentioned Mr. Hale, I think he even mentioned Bert Bates--I believe he did--and so he said, "In other words you turned it down?"

I said, "No sir, I'm not turning it down, I'm just telling you what I would rather do."

And he laughed and he said, "Well Riley, I had a chance to be sheriff once upon a time myself." And he said that he turned it down and he was always glad that he did.

I told him, "You know my position and so forth and it would be mighty hard for me to put some of my friends in jail."

I had been in charge of the wards for the whole northeast section of Memphis for several years. I had thirty-three precincts under me and the ones that got promotions and got jobs and so forth had to clear through the Ward Captain then on up. I had the final say so. Of course I went by what the Ward Captain or Ward Lieutennant said about the man.

First of all when I would go to Mr. Crump about the man that we were going to hire, he'd ask me, "Riley, in your opinion, is the man honest?" And I would tell him, "Yes." And he would say, "Well, why do you think

he is honest?" I'd tell him how I had checked on him, where he had worked and so forth and so on, then he wanted to know his qualifications, if he was qualified for the job.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was the second question.

MR. GARNER: And number three: "Was he friendly toward us?"

That was the one, two, three. Of course, after I got into politics, I went back to school and took some courses in public speaking. I had public speaking out at Memphis State, but I didn't think I had had enough of it, so I had three courses of public speaking at the University of Tennessee at night. Then I entered night Law School.

DR. CRAWFORD: Then you went back to Law School.

MR. GARNER: Southern Law University, yes. And I finished Law School. I graduated in 1950 from Law School and then got my license to practice law in 1951 when I took the Bar exam. And it has been a great help, being in politics and also being a lawyer, especially that we have two part-time lawyers working for us now.

DR. CRAWFORD: Have you ever felt that you would enjoy private practice?

MR. GARNER: Yes, I have. In fact, one time I went up to resign to go into the practice of law with a big law firm here in Memphis, Waring, Walker, Cox and Lewis. They offered me a very good deal. Mr. Crump talked me out of it. He said, "Some day son, there is going to be more lawyers in Memphis than there are cotton-pickers." So, frankly I think it is getting to be about that way now.

THE HISTORY OF THE CITY OF BOSTON

FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT TO THE PRESENT TIME

BY SAMUEL JOHNSON

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DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir. Well, in your work in politics in the county, Mr. Garner, you were in charge, I believe, of about thirty-three precincts in northeast Memphis. That was a lot of responsibility for a young man. How did you get into that?

MR. GARNER: Well, I don't know. He just appointed me to that area, northeast section of Memphis, and I was over all the Ward Captains and so forth and so on.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was this after you became County Trustee?

MR. GARNER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who else had positions similar to yours over other precincts around the city?

MR. GARNER: Well, Bruns McCarroll, who was the Chief of Traffic, had part of it. Hick Ewing, the County Clerk, had the south end.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you were accustomed to keeping up with money and details; you were used to administration as a result of your work here.

MR. GARNER: That's correct.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who besides Bruns McCarroll and Hickman Ewing have held positions similar to yours?

MR. GARNER: Carl Stokes who was Criminal Court Clerk.

DR. CRAWFORD: Carl Stokes?

MR. GARNER: Carl Stokes, right.

DR. CRAWFORD: Is he still living, sir?

MR. GARNER: Yes, he's still living. He's an attorney now and it's been so long ago, I'm just

trying to think. Francis Andrews was considered more or less over all of it. He was the County Register. Then, a few years later when we had a city election coming up, Guy Bates and I headed all of the wards. We were in charge of the wards of the city of Memphis.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what year that was sir?

MR. GARNER: Let's see, Mr. Crump died October of fifty-four. I believe that was fifty-three. I'm not certain about the dates. Anyway, the city election, I believe it was fifty-two, fifty-three.

DR. CRAWFORD: But before that you had shared the precinct work with Bruns McCarroll?

MR. GARNER: Bruns McCarroll, Carl Stokes and Hickman Ewing and seems to me like there was somebody else.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was Bruns McCarroll on the Police Force at that time?

MR. GARNER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what he was doing there?

MR. GARNER: He was an inspector, I believe in charge of traffic.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you handle the management of an area that large?

MR. GARNER: Well, you had what you called Ward Captains and under each Ward Captain is two lieutenants and then under the lieutenants you have the workers, which was

made up more or less of city and county employees and friends in the area. And of course we had it organized street by street. We had a very good political organization at that time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Let's see, you had wards, precincts, streets and everything organized.

MR. GARNER: Right. If you moved into a new neighborhood too, the Ward Captain or Ward Lieutenant would call on you and give you his card: "My name is so and so. If I can help you as far as getting your lights turned on or telephone or anything, call me. Here's my card." So right away that made an impression on you, see.

DR. CRAWFORD: That's a great deal of help to people when they move into an area.

MR. GARNER: It sure was.

DR. CRAWFORD: That's a little like Welcome Wagon is today, isn't it?

MR. GARNER: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: When and how was Welcome Wagon organized? Didn't that start here in the Crump era?

MR. GARNER: Yes, that started with a man by the name of Tom Briggs. In fact, I went to school with his nephew, Russ Briggs and then we were in the Naval Air Corps together. We've been good friends--went to Memphis State together. We've been good friends for I guess, forty years.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did he manage the first Welcome Wagon, or did he have someone to do that?

MR. GARNER: Tom Briggs?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes.

MR. GARNER: I'm not sure. Now probably Russell Briggs can tell you. Russell Briggs lives in Memphis now. And in fact, his uncle made him a millionaire overnight. He inherited about a third interest in Welcome Wagon.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was Mr. Briggs active in the organization?

MR. GARNER: No, not to my knowledge. If he was it was before my time.

DR. CRAWFORD: And what was Mr. M.A. Hinds' work at this time.

MR. GARNER: He was the Chief of Detectives. Chief of the Detective Division.

DR. CRAWFORD: What about the crime situation when Mr. Crump was here?

MR. GARNER: We just didn't have any crime situation. In fact, all of the thugs and everything, they bypassed Memphis. They were in jail overnight if they lit here, they just didn't light here.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were there any attempts to move in by organized crime in Mr. Crump's time that you know about?

MR. GARNER: I don't think so.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, they didn't get very far if they did try.

MR. GARNER: That's right. Well, one thing too, you had a policemen out in the wards--policemen in the street. He wasn't moved from one place to another and he got to know everybody and so that helped a lot. Of course, Memphis was a lot smaller

then and if any new people moved in and so forth and so on, well, they knew about it. They knew people that came in. So these crooks, in other words, it wasn't twenty-four hours before they were behind bars when they got to Memphis. The word got around nationally to bypass Memphis. Don't stop in Memphis, Tennessee.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they have more walking policemen then that got out and walked around?

MR. GARNER: That's correct, yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you suppose that helped?

MR. GARNER: I think it did, no question about it. Plus you had the same policemen in the same area and they got to know everybody that lived in that area.

DR. CRAWFORD: Apparently the police department didn't have difficulty then keeping up with what was going on in the city? How did they do that so well?

MR. GARNER: You mean how did they do it so well then?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes.

MR. GARNER: Because of the public relations and knowing so many people and knowing their precinct and knowing who lived in their precinct.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did it seem to you that people cooperated with the Police Department better then?

MR. GARNER: Oh yes, no doubt about it.

DR. CRAWFORD: What about the last time that you saw Mr. Crump? Do you remember the occasion,

Mr. Garner?

MR. GARNER: Yes, that was the time that I went up and they wanted me to run for sheriff.

DR. CRAWFORD: Would that have been in fifty-four?

MR. GARNER: Fifty-four, yes. And he walked with me to the elevator with his arm around my shoulder. We had decided really, when I brought up Buddy Dwyer's name, he related to me of an instance that happened many years ago before my time about Ed Reeves, who was Chief of Police at that time. And Ed Reeves' father was killed in a jail break--he was a jailer. And it was a horrible situation. So Ed Reeves was about five or six years old, no older than that, and he went out there and he put his hand on the little boy's head and he said, "Some day son, I would like to make you Sheriff of Shelby County."

And I said, "Mr. Crump, you make him Sheriff of Shelby County, and I'll withdraw."

And that happened. So he walked with me out to the elevator the last time that I saw him alive, with his arm on my shoulder and said, "I don't think you'll ever be sorry that you turned the sheriff's job down." I got on the elevator and told him good-bye and that was the last time I ever saw him in my life. Soon after that he got real sick and was in the hospital, couldn't have visitors. That was the last time I saw him alive.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, if you had become Sheriff you certainly would not have set your thirty year record.

MR. GARNER: No, six years I would have been out, but speaking of Mr. Crump--I wish you

could have known Mr. Crump. Of course, they tried to pretend that he was a big political boss, but I have never heard him give a direct order in my life. In fact, he would call and say, "Riley, if you are not doing anything, if you've got the time, drop by the office, I'd like to talk to you or do this." He was just that type of person. He was not the ruthless type that news media and all of them tried to make him look like. He was a very gracious type person.

In fact, he was a master coordinator when it came to politics. He believed in honesty. He lived in a goldfish bowl. And of course, if they could have gotten anything on him, they would have kicked him out long before. And he built an empire with E.H. Crump Insurance Company. And, of course, he ran for mayor--I think once after he was County Trustee. (In '39--that was before my day--before I got into politics and was elected, and when Walter Chandler was in Washington as a Congressman.) Mr. Crump was a Congressman, too, but I don't remember the years he was a Congressman--after he was a County Trustee. Then he brought Walter Chandler up then and replaced him in Congress. So then he ran for mayor, was elected and was going to be sworn in on New Year's Day. He met Walter Chandler on a train here at Union Station, swore Walter Chandler in as mayor or had him sworn in, then went on to the football game in New Orleans.

DR. CRAWFORD:

That was the Sugar Bowl, I guess.

MR. GARNER:

The Sugar Bowl. That was in '39. I've heard him tell about it. I was not in

politics at that time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Some people apparently would be successful in just about anything they do and maybe Mr. Crump was like that. What qualities do you think he had that made him most successful?

MR. GARNER: Well, he was absolutely honest, for one thing. And he got some men around him that were honest, and men around him that were qualified to do the job, and men around him that were loyal. In fact, all the elected officials around him--people around him--just dearly loved him and knew him.

DR. CRAWFORD: I have supposed that Mr. Crump probably was the kind of man who would have been outstanding in anything that he tried to do.

MR. GARNER: He would have made a good President of the United States, no doubt about that. And he had the ability. Anybody with a fifth grade education that had his ability, he was self-educated.

DR. CRAWFORD: He had gone to about the fifth grade, hadn't he?

MR. GARNER: He just went through the fifth grade.

DR. CRAWFORD: He was really a case of a self-made man.

MR. GARNER: He was definitely a self-made man.

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